

February 25th 2016

Dear Friends,

Here is the quick version:

- ❖ Feeling much gratitude for everything!
- ❖ What it's like here in town and the rural area... summertime, a safe friendly culture, a struggling economy beyond your imagination, a resilient people,
- ❖ There is an impending draught and feeding the hungry may be on the agenda in 2016,
- ❖ Our preschool is having several challenges – over \$2,000 can solve some unexpected problems... can you help us be part of the solution?
- ❖ Thank you for whatever you can do!

Here is the longer version:

It has been an extremely interesting and productive first week here on Zimbabwean soil. The sun warms one all the way through each day, and nighttime brings a light cool breeze so that sleep comes easy. I'm so grateful to have made it back to *kumusha* (one's rural home or area) after a 5 year hiatus. Much has changed, as is always the case when I return, but much is the same.

First, I have to say it is with profound gratitude that I carry out the vision and mission of Ancient Ways. The people here remind me of why I have chosen to do this work. And it is your support which comes as encouragement, financial donations, and prayers that moves this river forward with great heart. Thank you for all you have done in the past to help build the Nhimbe reality of programs and services! It is incredible to see it all in action. And, thank you in advance, for however you are moved in the future to help us as we work together.

The people offer hospitality as only Shona do, sharing what they have, offering help to make things easier, and always warmly greeting with large handshakes, hugs and the familiar cultural greetings. I am being cared for extremely well and it won't surprise me if I return home with an extra 10 pounds of Shona hospitality around my waist.

In town I am staying at a detective's home so have a nice secure place in Glen Nora A. It's quiet with a lovely yard, both of which are hard-to-come-by qualities in the townships. He's a very friendly fellow and one would not guess he does PI work. The home has all accommodations except when ZESA does load-shedding and the communities experience rolling blackouts. It is normal to be without electricity in town. Sometimes too, there is no water too, so all the homes have every spare bucket filled with water and lining the hallways.

In Mhondoro I stay at my late parent's home where I have a grass-thatched hut. Fortunately, I get help daily to heat my bath water over a fire (one of our *tsofso* stoves actually), make coffee, haul water from the well so it can be filtered, and make an evening meal. Weekly we have a laundry day as well as make a trip to the city for supplies and internet. We have met with local police or their plain-clothes officers more than once to assure me that everything is running smoothly in the area. We also stopped

in for our regular check-in with the chief of the region so he knows what's going on. We did the picture taking, gift of \$10 and everyone's favorite, some *biltong* (jerky).

The five years have not been particularly easy here. Much has transpired in the country's economy, and for each individual personally with losses and gains, as well as for the project. Catching up on what has happened is done like an old model T with bits and pieces, spurts and sputters, here and there, until eventually it will begin to ride more like a smooth sports car. It will most likely be time to catch my flight home at that point as I only had 3+ weeks.

Just an example about their economy, I was just told that my sister who lives in the rural area, now over 65, has a home in town she rents, but the renters have not been getting paid at their jobs since October and so can't pay her. They don't want to lose their job because the unemployment rate is so high. She doesn't put them on the street. This is a common problem. My other sister sews for people but she says she has to hold on to the garments sometimes because they can't come back with money to pay for her tailoring. Clearly there is always an upper class where there is big money moving, and it's no exception here. And there is a middle class but it's unclear how big that is and whether it's shrinking or getting larger. The economic outlook for the poor is tough, and most people here don't appear to have many money options.

The number one concern here is about a draught that is already taken its undeniable toll on many staple crops. Maize whose leaves crackle like tinder when they should be lush and green this time of year (late summer) is a critical example, as this is their primary source of dietary satisfaction, normally two times a day. Peanuts, providing protein and oil, most often enjoyed as *dovi* (peanut butter), show bountiful-looking green leaves at first glance, but there is nary a nut underground where they would usually be prolifically reproducing, growing like tiny potatoes. Unfortunately we've seen several crops such as beans, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes, which look the range between crisp around the edges, to devastated or stunted. Normally harvest would be kicking into full swing soon and instead there is a dwindling. The little city gardens that are planted along side of every foot of the road in town are looking better than the rural areas but the lack of rain is showing there too. Fortunately we have had short bursts of thunder showers or light mists falling, but it's not quite what is needed to quench the dry soil's thirst.

Our primary stewardship is for the preschooler's daily diet and when I arrived they were still unable to find enough maize for the term. Some puzzle pieces slipped into place in the last couple of days and now we are covered with 2 buckets set aside for next term as well. The famine itself hasn't quite hit yet, but it is evidenced everywhere, with dry brown plants instead of green, and the noted topic of concern at each turn of the conversation.

The preschool children are happy and carefree as they should be. Each day they are enjoying a different meal, to include a variety of maize, rice, beans, fish, bread, peanut butter, and soya supplemented with some fruits and vegetables. They have less fresh produce from the garden than desired so we will buy some vegetable seeds, maybe \$25-30, and see if we can infuse the garden program with some juice. The challenge remains getting water.

Today 4 fellows worked together to go down into the well and relay out buckets of sludge from the bottom of our preschool well. Not only was it blocking the water coming in, but had also clogged the pump (donated by an organization who loves what we have going). The health inspector got the pump working again which is superb since bucketing water for the kids is a job in itself. It looks like this dredging effort may help for a bit, but the water table in the whole of Zimbabwe has lowered due to the draught, so we may need to deepen the well.

On our journey to take pictures of wells, one of the well recipients had originally dug their well to 43 feet but had just removed the well cap (top cement lid that keeps debris and pathogen-filled groundwater out), so that they could deepen their well. Time for the young bucks in the family to climb down in there and dig it down further. This is happening to many families. This weather is relentlessly creating hardship and the only way out is through.

Our board of directors had prepared to make sure the basics were covered here but hadn't planned on any unexpected issues. We in Ancient Ways have been working with a tighter budget each year since the housing market tipped, and all keep hoping for economic recovery, not just for family and friends, but also because of how it impacts the charitable communities and available income to help those in need. So I arrive here with a short list to accomplish and it expands like a mushroom overnight. We have some serious things to overcome and I'm counting on some of you reading this who will be interested in helping us accomplish them.

On the one hand, I am sorry to have my first field report be such a financial eye-opener...I was assuming I would be just giving a little update. But on the other hand, this is the real-meal-deal, and life doesn't stop because one's belt is tight. You'll see as you read on that we are facing a series of concerns. Please let me know what you think:

1. We have 6 staff who need to go to the local hospital at St Michael's Mission and get a health check, which runs \$30 each, as they are working with the children and so need to get a check-up. I imagine it is to verify no communicable diseases like tuberculosis. I'm sure being HIV positive is not an issue. The mileage costs 30 cents a kilometer so are estimating \$20. This medical report will end up costing a total of \$200 and will last a year.
2. These same 6 people also need to get checked out by the police, fingerprinted and such, which primarily is a transport cost of \$17.
3. Our kitchen pots have been condemned by the health inspector as they are rusting. It is a metal commonly used that isn't worth its weight in scrap. We need to replace them with cast iron for around \$170. These are very large pots.
4. The social services department has required us to replace plates, cups and spoons, etc., costing about \$28.
5. The preschool and inventory huts need to have re-thatched as the rain is coming inside. We don't yet have an estimate.
6. The preschool curtains are shot and have been waiting for a turn to get replaced but other things have always continued to be the priority. We don't yet have an estimate but know that the fabric may cost around \$2 per meter and there are 18 good-sized windows.
7. The preschool has 5 windows which have been broken in accidents and need repair, costing about \$50.
8. If taking the sludge out of the well doesn't work, it will cost around \$174 to deepen the well.
9. The toilets fill to the top in the rainy season and so we need to build a toilet that is far deeper to handle the situation. This is a rural Blair pit-style toilet. This would cost \$350. That cost is only if the parents dig the hole, which they will work together to accomplish.
10. All of these things cost well over \$1,000 and were all unplanned. There are not extra funds to cover these things at this point but I am hopeful that the way forward will be made clear.

We are also having a burgeoning 2016 enrollment. Up from an average of 60 children, we are looking at 115 little people this year! There will be some attrition as there usually is, maybe dropping to 90 or so, but in any case we need an additional preschool teacher since each teacher should handle an absolute maximum of 30 kids. We really need the third teacher in any case, so have all

agreed to use the money dedicated to help the parents with uniform costs (all Zimbabwean must legally wear a uniform), and instead hire the teacher. This would cost \$285 for the rest of the year. They have someone already in mind - she is the librarian, has been a reliable help, and loves children.

This increase in enrollment will also mean another \$900 or so to be able to feed these kids. Not sure where this is going to come from! One of the headman (who is in charge of one of the villages) asked if there was anything we could do for all of the babies at home since he's been observing less and less food available. All we can do at this point is listen.

If we don't ask for your support in all of this we will have to send these little ones away from school. Now, particularly during the forthcoming draught, the people count on the preschool to help make sure their children have enough to eat. Children's neural pathways are being laid for their whole life right now at this tender age. Thank you for whatever you can do. Please email me directly at jaiaen@gmail.com if you like, to say you can help, or have an idea for funding (how might we collaborate?) as I can check my email about once a week. We are open to grants, being part of a fundraiser, and just about anything to make a difference. Tatenda chaizvo!

It's been an intensely packed week and I'm in need of sleep so should sign off. Next week I expect to have a lot to share about our young girls programs as we are in-progress implementing a Monthly Care program, as well as will have an update about the preschool parents and what they are doing to raise money here. Saturday night we'll have a small gathering for Lodi, my late husband, AKA the legendary white *mukwasha* (son-in-law), and so will get to relax a bit for that, and just hang out.

Watch for the next field report and let me know what you think! Register your opinion here... Do we send children home? Do we expand to meet the need? We definitely prioritize, but some of the things can't be removed from the list so tell me – what do we do? I appreciate any help you offer in any way.

Thank you very much! Tatenda chaizvo!

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